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The Excepts of Our Lord

A COURSE OF SERMONS

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DELIVERED IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ALL SAINTS, ALBANY
ON THE FRIDAY EVENINGS IN LENT 1884
BY THE DEAN

THE REV. FRANK L. NORTON, D.D.



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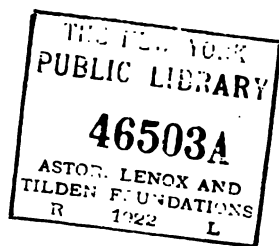
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DEDICATION.

To the Teachers and Pupils of St. Agnes' School,
who formed so large and intelligent a part of my
congregation on Evenings in the Lent of 1884,
these lectures are affectionately dedicated by their
friend and Dean,

FRANK L. NORTON.

CATHEDRAL OF ALL SAINTS,
ALBANY, 1884.

PROY VON
CLUB
VIA

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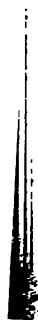
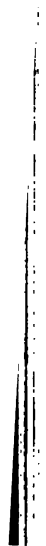
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SERMON I.



“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”—ST. JOHN, iii. 5.

WHILE Christ “will have all men to be saved,” he has, in Scripture, uttered six remarkable sayings, which are unmistakable conditions of salvation. Each of these sayings, or conditional sentences of Our Blessed Lord, begins with the Greek equivalent of the English word *except*. I take for this evening’s sermon, the first of these *excepts*—and have for my subject, “The means of Grace, without which God does not impart Life.” By “life,” I mean that higher spiritual life, without which the atmosphere of Heaven would be so rare that within it, a soul ignorant of the New Birth, would be suffocated, and die. It is Holy Baptism, of course, which Christ was teaching that

proud ruler of the Jews, who came to Him by night, afraid of his own people; coming secretly with, perhaps, a fancy that Christ would be gratified by a secret visit from so great a man as himself. He, doubtless, expected some unusual notice to be taken of his visit, at least some point of controversy to be started upon which he might argue, and show his learning and clever skill in debate. But our Lord, turning his searching yet tender eyes upon the questioner, declares: *Except* a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." He takes the proud ruler's question, "How can a man be born again?" very differently from that sense in which he seemed to mean it, and goes straight in His simple dignity to the man's inner soul. The great man was offended, just as great men recoil to-day, in their self-sufficiency, from the simple things of

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body. That talk on Christian Baptism, given him in secret, laid the foundation in him of a brave, unshrinking faith which carried him through the rest of his earthly life, and beyond, into the paradise of God. The shrinking, timid questioner, stealing to Christ by night became so bold by the possession of this faith, that when the Saviour was left alone, it was he who dared, with Joseph, of Arimathea, to go before the Government, and risk everything for a cause that had failed and gone out of sight ; and *demand* the body of Jesus and give it honorable sepulture. Christ taught him that this new birth is not “a developing of some latent power ;” it is not “bringing out the constitutional tendency,” and guiding it. It is a new nature, a new level, a new plane, a new sphere, into which human nature is to be exalted by the power of God. It is a

birth, with all which that implies. It is not the water sprinkled, in itself that works the wondrous change ; but because Christ chooses to unite the water and the spirit into that mystic marriage which results in a new born soul ; a union which God has sanctioned and which man may not put asunder. Happy indeed was it that Nicodemus yielded up all his difficulties and objections, and humbly accepted what Jesus taught him. He gave him the ideal character to follow which was to be “according to this beginning.” Nicodemus was a *good* man already. He was a moral man. He was a man of affairs, a gentle man ; refined, polished, cultured. A man who shrewdly kept at peace with the reigning powers, both in state and synagogue, both in things temporal and spiritual. We all know this class of persons. Our society and our churches are full

of them. Now, if Nicodemus had been a Sadducee, Jesus' exhortation would not have been so remarkable in its seeming, but to take a *Pharisee*, who was rigorous in every external duty—that is, in what we should call *moralities*, to take such a good moral man, and say, “you must be born again”—that was indeed surprising. He says, virtually, that all of the good points in Nicodemus' character are excellent; but they are only the good soil upon which spiritual seed would find a ready lodgment—the preparation of that to which God's spirit would lead him. He seems to say, “the true ideal is that to which you are to come, not by keeping the law rigidly, not by the force of your own will, not by the influences of all the social sympathies which surround you, but by the power of the Holy Ghost.” That which, when your soul is inspired and lifted into the

sympathy and presence of the Divine heart, itself, is produced in you, *that* is the manhood, that is the nature which you are to seek.

Just consider for a moment, in the light of this principle which Christ laid down, the much debated question of *Morality*. A man says, "are we to understand that a man is to substitute this," if I may so say, "second nature," which is born in him, or rather out of which he is born by the operation of the Holy Ghost for *Morality*? I answer that the point is here : That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; a man is amiable from good digestion ; a kind and generous friend from an active circulation and because he is successful in life. He is a temperate man because wine is distasteful to him ; he is a chaste man because he has a phlegmatic, a cold nature. These things are matters of temperament,

good, excellent, much to be desired. But often they are granted to people like their complexions and the shape of their hands and feet, while to others they are vouchsafed by the Grace of God after the labor of the new birth. These moralities in either case bear the same relation to the after life which the lower leaves of a plant bear to its blossoming. We do not say before the lily throws out its pure and fragrant flower, that the leaves are good for nothing; and yet who would be content with the green, cool blades of the lily and be denied its flower? Who would be put off with the ground leaves of a hyacinth, and not have the cluster of flowers which is the ultimate, highest' form to which it can be brought by the finer forces of light and heat? And so in human life, we must not confound the *birth* of a child with its life. The birth of the infant is

the result and consequence of its previous life. It must be born because it *is* a living creature which, having passed through an embryo existence, must now by *birth* be placed in new relations and under the power of new influences and conditions adapted to its development and perfect growth. In our creed we are taught that our Lord "was *conceived* by the Holy Ghost, *born* of the Virgin Mary." To that pattern must our life be conformed. The still-born child is born indeed, but derives no benefit from its birth; only the living, breathing child must needs be born, that it may continue to live and grow by the supply of appropriate sustenance to every power and faculty. So the great duties which belong to the constitution of the home and of the State are *pre-requisite*. They come along in the same operation. They do not, however,

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reach to that condition which we call *piety*—or to that condition which Christ would bring us to by the new birth. “What is *my* morality worth, then?” you ask. The Indian in his wigwam knows a great many things, but he is not a civilized man. Suppose he should put this question, “What is all I do know worth, if this is *not* civilization? If I am brought out of this state, am I to leave all these things and count them as nothing?” Certainly he is not. Relatively to his condition, they are unspeakably important, but as compared with a higher development, they are of very little value. That is to say, if he should become noble and refined in civilized life, he would look back with pity upon the condition that he was in when wigwam and wampum were home and means. Not because they were in, and of themselves, bad, but because he was so

far from having attained by growth and development that which was possible to him. When we began to learn to write, our letters were crooked enough, our sentences all went up-hill—the writing was a hideous scrawl. But would we say to our children, “It is good for nothing, your cramped and crude beginnings?” Not at all. They are good to commence with—and good to end with so soon as you can go on to perfection, making the lines of beauty and a fair page. Moralities are the embryo children—the ground leaves—the cramped writing—the wigwam and the wampum; but they must not be confounded with the higher developments of the new manhood which has its birth out of the water and the Spirit. When we urge the necessity of the means of grace, this new birth, men get the impression that we undervalue

truth, and honor and justice and fidelity to trust. The trouble is that men over-value them and ask with irony rather than in humility, "What lack I yet?" I grant their value and beg men if they will have nothing better cling to them as I would say to them, "If you can obtain nothing more valuable than copper, have it, but if you can rise to silver, take silver; but if you can get gold, take the highest." So in morals, restrain your appetites and passions. Develop kindly sympathies. Live to do good among your fellow-men. But do not think for one single moment that these are the sum total of manhood. They are the mere brush that grows at the root of the tree, at the bottom of the trunk. They are not the broad tree. They are not the magnificent blossoms of the magnolia—the pure, white blossoms of Spiritual Life are high above these in

a better air and under a stronger sun, and yet I am constantly meeting with men who say, in substance, "What does all this talk about following Christ amount to? There are surely better men outside than many inside the church's pale. They are upright men whose word is as good as their bond, charitable men, to whom the widow and orphan never appeal in vain, temperate men who are ever active in their endeavors to reclaim those who have yielded to their appetite for drink—men who are seeking to impress the community with their example and the purity of their lives." Indeed there are these self-sacrificing, sterling characters, and unthinking people sometimes say, "Well, *they* are good enough Christians for me." Alas! but this simple declaration of our Lord's proclaims that they lack the one thing which is the dis-

tinctive characteristic of that manhood which grows out of the new birth. It requires *not* that men should do certain just things and merciful things and pure things, but that they should have raised themselves above the mere moral condition of life, and come, by the touch of God's creative Spirit into the super-sensuous state, prepared to rise out of this natural sphere, into the sphere above, and become members of the great assembly where are the Spirits of Just men made perfect, saved by regeneration, not from retribution or penalty hereafter, but *saved now* from sin. There is many a Christian, it is true, who is put to shame by them who have not confessed Christ before men; but we are not to measure ourselves by human standards. It may seem that the Church is "*illiberal*," because she will not, and dare not lower the con-



ception of what Christianity requires. But remember this always, when you hear the popular cry of *liberality*—that truth is always just narrow enough to exclude error. They are the truest liberals who lift up the ideal of character, and character must build up and out from the germ life which is born out of the Spirit. When, therefore, our Lord says that “morality is not sufficient,” and that is, substantially, what he declares to Nicodemus, when he says that the ideal character is one that is born of God, and that it is by the power of the Divine Spirit that we are to come into it, and that we cannot come into it by any other instrumentality; He is the truest friend of Man; and among men, he is the most generous and kind who maintains that ideal and shows his fellow-men, not that the things which belong to the body are worthless,

but that true Manhood is far higher than the body can reach, and far higher than ordinary reason can attain—so high that it can only be groped after, like the newly-born infant stretches out its untried hands toward the first glimmering of the shaded light—only reached by the power of God developing the nascent nature of the new-born soul—a mystery no more profound than that which surrounds the entrance into the natural life which every one must concede.

Do you ask me what becomes of those who reach so high on the plane of morality but who do not touch the yet higher plane of Spirituality? Tell me of the marksman who *almost* hits the mark but does *not* hit it. Tell me of the anchor that is let out from the ship and reaches *almost* to the bottom! Tell me of the portrait exquisitely painted and is *almost*

the likeness of your dearest and best, and yet fails to satisfy ! Tell me of the skilled physician who *almost* cures your child, yet lets him die, and I can tell you of the man who is not *far* from the Kingdom of God, yet fails to enter in. But one thing, as the messenger of my King, I may and do declare, that while He is all-powerful to save, no one who has been directed to this clear truth, who has had it urged upon him again and again, whose soul has been stimulated and electrified by the power of this truth as it is in Jesus Christ—yet prefers his own scheme of salvation—has a right to ask for entrance through another portal. The plan is so plain, so simple, so all-embracing that I tremble when I contemplate the awful blasphemy which dares even to conjecture, much less formulate in words, the question are not the Abana and Pharpar of my poor moral-

ity a sufficient substitute for the simple obedience demanded from me, "Wash and be clean."

It is not that we have developed very much. It is not that we have a point of development established in us that determines our safety. It *is* that the Spirit of God has gained a lodgment in the soul; that the heaven is there; that the root is thrown down, and the germ is pointed up, that gives us ground for hope. *That* being secured, there is an infinite space, called "Eternity" for men to develop in. God has promised to give His Holy Spirit to them that simply ask for it. He has chosen, and that is enough for us; He has chosen to couple the gift with the Baptism of Water in the Triune Name. The seed is sown *then*. How? I do not know, for God is silent there. But whatever the plausibleness of modern reason-

ings in respect to *character*; whatever may seem the real excellence of human attainments; no man is in the kingdom of God, unless he has developed those higher spiritual forces and come into this ideal state of manhood by the regenerating power of God, the Holy Ghost. You may be amiable men, upright men, pure men; and still we hear that plain, simple sentence of Christ, "Except a man be born again,"—not changed into a full-grown Christian, but become a *babe*—not sufficient in itself, but simply a child asking to be taught. To you I bring this message which teaches of a life outside and above these animal faculties—this higher life into which you must be born: Does the doctrine seem hard? Is the new birth a mystery you cannot comprehend? Christ says: "If any man will *do my will*, he shall *know* of the *doctrine*."

His *will* is expressed in plainest terms :
“ Believe and be baptized; ” “ This do in remembrance of me.”

But one thing remember, that, in the simple obedience of these two commands, you are not saying to the world that you “ have got religion,” or that you “ have met with a change,” as the expressions go. You are not “ *professing* ” anything about yourself. You *are confessing* that you are weak and Christ is strong. You enter the kingdom, not because you are good already and now *profess* your saintliness ; but because you long to be better, and because there are helps and graces there which you need and *must* have. The Church is a hospital where sick souls are gathered to be healed. You find there patient watchfulness and thoughtfulness. You ask admittance because you are helpless and because you are deadly sick.

You are born into the kingdom and begin your life of infancy. You do not say at your baptism or confirmation, "Behold I have attained to a full growth," "I am better than others." You simply confess that you cannot be what you desire to be without help. You empty yourself of all thought that you can work out your higher possibilities alone. You creep and toddle first before you can walk upright. You are fed first with milk before you can bear the stronger meat of the Word. But I offer you who want to be better men and better women these *means*. *Obedience*, before you have any right to ask anything of God. Then *knowledge*, which God promises to them who obey. Then constant growth, from the infancy born out of water and the Holy Spirit to the full growth of a spiritual manhood nourished by *the* Bread which is His Body

and *the* wine which is His blood. Oh ! men and women ! do I hear you make that pitiful excuse, "I cannot take the responsibility ?" The *responsibility* is already laid upon you. Be wise and shift the responsibility upon Him who will gladly bear it for you. Do you, *can* you *dare* to bear it alone ? Do you *dare* to live without God in the world ? Do you *dare* to *die* without obeying the simple command, "Wash and be clean ?" Do you *dare* to *live* without "Doing this in remembrance of Him ?" How will you dare to meet, at last, those sadly searching eyes and to hear the words of an offended God, "I never knew you !" for I told you through my servant, long ago, that "Except you were born again, you could not enter in ?"

SERMON II.

"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."—ST. LUKE, xiii. 5.

CHRIST was preaching to a great multitude of people—so many having gathered together "that they trod one upon another." These hearers had in their minds certain events that had occurred within their own experience, and with that proneness of human nature to make sermons apply to other people rather than to one's self, began with wagging heads and voluble tongues to make the application then and there. His subject was "Repentance," and His discourse was heard in much the same temper with which earnest appeals are listened to to-day; and when our Lord closed His sermon with an awful sentence of denunciation, the threatening of the eternal prison of condemnation to

the impenitent, they began their hurried talk about the shocking crime of Pilate, who had desecrated the holy Temple by bringing in his brutal soldiery there, and murdering certain Galileans who were engaged in offering their sacrifices. It was an outrage much talked about in Jerusalem; and these good people at once sought to turn the point of Christ's invective against themselves, and said as it were, "Oh, Master! yes, indeed—what can be said strong enough in pointing out the enormity of such sin as Pilate's? Such sacrilege! Such political treachery! Is it not a sign of these dreadful times in which the chosen people of God are suffering at the hands of those wretched Gentiles! Fie upon them! Ah, they do, indeed, richly merit punishment—*they* surely had best hasten to repent. And then, too, those people, those eighteen upon whom the

tower of Siloam fell ! dear Master, what can we think of them ? What do you say of them ? What grossly wicked men they must have been to merit such an overwhelming catastrophe !”

The gentle Saviour, looking into those basely hypocritical hearts, at once couples the threat for Galilee *and* Jerusalem, and replies : “Suppose ye that *these* Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that *they* were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem ? I tell you, nay ; but *except* YE repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”

And then with gracious, loving condescension He tells them in that familiar parable of the fig tree which the master of the vineyard finding bearing nothing but leaves, when fruit should have been

ripening thereon, ordered it cut down ; but listening to the dresser's plea for yet a longer trial, with more care and culture bestowed ; He shows them themselves with *their* leaves of pretence, and their desert of condemnation, but with yet a longer space given for amendment. It is the lesson of the ages since. "Special Providences" are *special* in their application more frequently than in their occurrence.

Great conflagrations, fearful floods by which towns and homes are destroyed, may be "special providences" to us who have not suffered them, if they cause us to listen to the clarion call, "Unless ye repent, ye shall likewise perish." Not by hugging ourselves in complacency, and rolling our eyes in conscious virtue, that we must be better than those upon whom flood and fire have wrought destruction.

In our own day, with marvellous opportunities of gathering news from every point of the earth, focused upon the burning, bristling pages of our daily papers, we have constant calls to repentance ; from Egypt and her rebel hordes, England and her secret foe, the rivers of our Western plains, great fires in sister cities. Think ye the dwellers there are sinners above us who have our habitations here ? We have plenty of warning. What is our duty ? Is Repentance a vague thing ? It is one of our blessed Lord's conditions of salvation. He declares that without it we shall all likewise perish. I would to God, I could bring it, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so home to your hearts and consciences and to mine, that it should be a vital, living, sentient thing to us this Lent. You know that in the natural world, where the furrows are,

the dew and the rainfall come ; that is, in sterile, barren fields, or on the prairies where no cultivation has taken place, the rain is scant and the dew light ; but when the harrow has turned up the virgin soil, broken the hard, encrusted surface, the rain and the dew fall plentifully, and soon the water-courses form. So when the harrow of repentance gets to work upon the sodden surface of a cold, hard, encrusted nature, and the broken heart lies turned up toward heaven, the dew of the Spirit begins to gently fall, and the sweet sympathetic drops of that rain which nourishes, but does not beat down, begins to fall, and the water-courses of a daily nurture in Divine things begin to form, about whose banks spring up the gracious fruits of the Spirit.

Now, plainly, what *is* repentance ? It is *not* remorse, for remorse broods and

kills, but repentance changes the mind. The *Greek* word simply means, "to know or perceive afterwards;" that is, to change one's mind, just as "conversion" is to change one's direction—to turn about and go the other way. So "repentance" is the change of mind which gives the direction to life, and I like to remember the Latin "repens," from "repere," to *creep*, because all true repentance brings us to the creeping attitude—down upon our knees! And when we come into God's house, or when we enter into our closet to pray and to confess our sins, I cannot comprehend the condition of mind in man or woman that would permit the taking of any other position when praying than down upon the knees. *True* repentance, a really overwhelming sense of sin, cannot find expression, while we are *in* these mortal bodies, in "leaning forward," as

the expression is, or in placing a fan in front of one's face—or in the listless, thoughtless, godless attitudes which shock God-fearing men in Christian assemblies, and I verily believe *must* be an abomination to God Himself, who has chosen to call these bodies of ours "Temples of the Holy Ghost." True repentance, wrought out of godly sorrow, changes the mind and so the whole direction of life, and as we mean by "salvation"—a saving from sin and so from penalty—a man who truly repents *is* saved. There are religious teachers who proclaim that all that is needed for salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In one sense that is true but not in the sense in which it strikes the popular mind. One separate act of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ does not secure a man's salvation any more than it secures the fulfilment of a man's design.

A young man working in a shop, and, for aught he knows, dedicating all his life to industry of a manual character, finds himself, little by little, drawn in other lines and directions ; and, at last, the impulse of *art* is so strong in him that he begins, in his leisure hours, to paint, to sketch, to draw, and this impulse grows in him till, by and by, it occurs to him, " Why should I not change my business? Why should I be a carpenter, a machinist, a mechanic? Why should I not be an artist?" And at last he makes up his mind that he will, and says, "*I will* become one." Now that resolution is the turning point in the youth's history. But does that resolution make him an artist? It does, and it does not. It is that, without which he would not be an artist, and yet the being one is to result from incessant application, from patience,

from practice, from all that grows up, out of such a general resolution as that.

So in life's work which is tending toward higher things. Repentance is the changing of mind from lower and basilar aims ; the reaching one's ideal is another thing, but the starting-point is at the crossing of the two roads running in different directions, and the sign-post reads, "repent." The direction changes ; the journey's end depends upon keeping in the same path, going on step by step. Salvation is not a primary act, with transforming power in it—a kind of "effectual calling," by which a man is emptied of all sin and all power of future sin ; standing, by the compressing and moulding hand of God, a saint upon the threshold of endeavor. Even after a man has "changed his mind," which is the first meaning of repentance, then obeyed the known com-

mands, "Wash and be clean;" "This do in remembrance of me," after he has made some attainments in a spiritual life, no matter how far a man may be advanced in spiritual development, his condition is always spoken of as an incompleted thing. We must "work out our salvation." We are to build up a character which shall need Heaven itself in which to finally develop and mature.

Repentance is the foundation—that which gives solidity to this character-building, and in "edifying"—building up this character the disposition is to be worked out of all selfishness and pride, and envy, and jealousy and sordidness, and obedience to the flesh and *into* Christ-likeness. *That* is what practical repentance will do for you and me. There is great zeal and intense enthusiasm manifested in bringing people to confirmation,

but when they have thus been brought they have only begun. They are just in the Alphabet. It is a thousand times more important that men should have great pressure brought to bear upon them just after they have started in a Christian life than before. It is more important to build up in them holy Christian dispositions in detail than that the mere initial steps should have been taken. We lose sight of this too much as if Repentance was an act done once for all. It is a *state*, rather than a single act. It must extend all through life. It is that condition of the heart which always suggests an open furrow full of seed—turned up to the sky, waiting for the rain and the dew, and the sun. There are in the natural world certain things that are essential to harvests. First there must be a source of life and power—the sun second—there

must be a soil or medium upon which that power acts. Third, there must be plant-life; there must be a germ on which it acts. And last, there must be a volition which sets in motion the machinery of the husbandman. There is not a bit of moss, nor a spire of grass, nor a shrub that lives of which you may not say that it lives by the power of the sun. If the sun were extinguished, all vegetation would die. But on the other hand, the sun, if it had ten thousand times as much life as it has, shining on a rock, could not make a clover blossom. It has been shining thousands of years upon Sahara's desert, and you may carry in your hand all the herbage that has grown there. But although nothing that lives could live if it were not for the sun, the sun could not give life if there were not something to give it to—if there were not a soil with germs, or

roots, or seeds in it. What the plant is, determines what the Sun does by it, and the Sun determines what the plant is to do. They work together. The Sun is dependent on the organization of the plant, and the growth of the plant is dependent on the stimulation of the Sun. Now apply this to spiritual things. The "repent plant" is what horticulturists call the creeping fern. The Sun of Righteousness shines into our "repent hearts," our creeping hearts—broken contrite hearts that send *us* upon our knees, and with the soil thus prepared and made ready, it will bring forth fruits meet for repentance. That is what all true character-building consists in. It is to be worked out. It is like a portrait painted here bit by bit, but projected beyond the veil in all its completeness. It is the weaving of a pattern on the seamy-side—the glorious


unity of design to be made plain when we see face to face. God is helping you, do not be discouraged. God is stimulating you. He coöperates with you, in your effort, but He does not supersede what you are doing. You are not dead canvas on which He is painting. You are not a plate on which the light of His countenance shines, bringing out a picture. You work and God works, each in his own sphere. You repent, you creep, you are much on your knees. God answers your plea for the Holy Spirit's care and guidance, and the result will be a full-grown, perfectly developed Christian character.

It is a matter of *perpetual* solicitude. You cannot afford to rest on the few things that you did early in your Christian life. This holy season is an awakening time, a time for repentance, of breaking up hard ground, of boring into the tough

places in encrusted hearts. The time is passing rapidly. How are you improving it? The call is made and our Lord is uttering no uncertain word in the text. Is your mind still unchanged? You know what the especial lust, or sin, or temptation you intended at first to give up. Have you yielded since? Then there is a crack in the mortar of your edifice, of this character which you are building. Now is the time to repair the damage on your knees. It is a merciful thought that God will at last accept all the honest imperfections; only the nearer perfection we bring our poor structures, the greater will be our capacity for enjoyment in the reward. When we have wrought the best things we can, by our love, our faith, our hope, our higher faculties, they will in the sight of God be very coarse and very insufficient; but out

of the bounty of His own great pity and generosity He will say "I accept them; welcome, ye blessed of the Lord, come in and dwell forever with me!" God suffered rather than that you should suffer; and He lays the strength of His mighty hand under you and says, "Let me lift you up by my power!" Many Lents have passed. Will not some of you who have waited and wavered through them all respond this year to the call?

I ask some whom I am glad to see here. I speak to the heartfelt yearning which I know you feel for this "change of mind" which will bring you to the life that must be "according to this beginning." I speak to you who never see yonder altar vested for the Holy Feast that you do not say, "I wish *I* was a communicant of the Church." I speak to you who never think of your father



and your mother who have entered into life that you do not say, "I wish I were as sure of my future happiness as I am of theirs. I speak to you whose heart has taken sides with God again and again, against yourself, and I say, let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Begin with the godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, and upon that, by God's help begin to work out that character which shall ennoble you here and make you blessed hereafter.

SERMON III.


"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven."—ST. MATT., xviii. 3.

THERE has been much confusion and a great deal of misconception, in the matter of what conversion, or a change of heart may be. Most of the trouble has arisen from a purely human interpretation of Scripture, and from the accretions, which a party and sectarian controversy occasion. The plan of redemption and salvation is simple and plain enough if men would only become little children in faith and love; and if the relation between them and God could always be that of a kind Father and an obedient, trustful child. But men have had this or that view of election, or saving grace; of faith and works; and to maintain one

error, they have put into God's mouth words He never uttered; and have engrafted upon their systems of theology the most hideous and monstrous doctrines. None has been more wretched in its effects upon the souls of men than the doctrine that a change of heart, or conversion must always be attended by some strong and mighty upheaval of a man's whole nature. They would have the still calm surface of life's river lashed into foam over the rocks of some spiritual upheaval, and then flow on calmly and placidly again until it reaches the sea of eternity. Now this is purely a man-arranged scheme. God's usual method in *grace* as well as *nature* is gentle; the dews and quiet rain, the sunshine and orderly sequence of the seasons are His agents for working His mighty results. The earthquake and the storm, the


hail, the wind, and lightning stroke are His exceptional instrumentalities. His matured and well-rounded saints are they who, as little children, first received the baptismal dews, and then fed and nourished within the tenderly guarded fold of the Church of Christ, have grown up into all excellence, being pillars of the truth ; while many a conscientious, God-fearing man has waited anxiously, with a yearning desire, for some mighty wrenching of his soul, some thunderbolt that should kill at one fell stroke the old Adam of his total depravity, ere the New Man could be raised up in him. And many a man has died, unconsolated by any comforts of religion, or thinking himself not one of God's elect, has lapsed into a dogged and infidel indifference. I have a very strong feeling that what we call "sudden" in speaking of conversion may, after all, be

as *relative* to the act as the word "sudden" when applied to the things in Nature. We speak of the lightning flash as "sudden," but if we have watched the black clouds surcharged with their opposing currents, slowly gathering their forces above the horizon and perhaps occupying hours before the edges touch and the flash occurs, we would realize that it was only the consummation of that which had been long preparing. So in the eruption of a volcano, we call the belching forth of the molten lava "sudden," but it is simply the outcome of forces, long seething in the hidden cauldrons of the earth. We are startled now and again by some "sudden" outbreak of rebellion and anarchy, but the quiet student of history can trace the long line of events, the repression of noble aspirations, the petty tyranny of absolute power which has




made life in the State intolerable, until the slowly lain train of events breaks forth into revolt. So it is with the soul life. What seems to us a sudden conversion is often the result of gradually awakening moral impulses felt and repelled, the slowly mouldering fire kindled by a mother's prayerfulness, all overlaid by carelessness, fanned into living coals by some passing wind of the Spirit and bursting forth with all the vigor of a newly lighted flame.


Even in that marvellous conversion of Saul of Tarsus, we can never know how much of smouldering preparation may have been sown in him, beneath the hard, stiff covering of Pharasaic pride, by testimonies heard from dying lips, in which the Jesus, whom he persecuted, had began already to show him something of His majesty, before that vision on the road to




Damascus. Remember *this*, that “sudden” is a word indicative of our own imperfect knowledge, and it is the veriest presumption for men to elevate it into a law; and to declare that God works in this, and no other way. It has done more to keep men outside the pure and elevating influence of the Church than any other one device of the evil one himself. But some one asks, do you not believe in a change—in an entire transformation of character? I answer, that it happens all the time. If you take a child in your household, you will find that it has certain hereditary tendencies—a certain nascent character. He is naturally selfish, easily provoked, irritable—we charitably call it “nervousness”—but by judicious training, and the application of certain antidotes for these natural tendencies, he becomes generous, with a power of self-control,



and is living, at ten years old, upon a very different plane from that upon which he started. The change of character results from the steady unfolding or drawing out—that is, education. But in a house where the children direct, and grow up gross, self-willed, opinionated, is it possible that there shall come a time when, by a sweeping influence from on high, all this fearful error may be effaced, and all the future changed? Is there in the human mind what may be the equivalent of a stop in an organ? The sesquialter may be drawn, the trumpet stops may be playing and the most hideous, ear piercing sounds may be given forth, and then the flute, the clarionet, and other stops may be drawn, and sounds will be emitted as sweet and charming as a nightingale's song. Now, is it possible to do any such thing with the human soul? Men think



it is. They think a man can go all through the gamut of vice, impure in thought and practice, and that, coming home from abroad, for example, and stopping at a town where there is a great revival, he can go into one of the meetings, and become softened, and have an impulse seize him, and rush to the "inquiry seat," and pray for himself, and be prayed for ; and go through a tremendous whirl of excitement and finally shout, "Glory to God ! I have got the blessing !" and come out converted. But it is not true that a life or forty years is revolutionized in a minute. The change can be BEGUN in a minute. The man's purpose may be turned in a minute and so his direction. That is the meaning of "conversion." Here is a fast flying express train, running at a tremendous rate of speed, which in three or four miles will bring into destructive



collision with a train rushing in the opposite direction, and the switch-tender knows it ; and as the train comes thundering on, he turns the switch, which causes the deviation of a single inch, and when the train reaches the point, it passes upon the other track—the danger is averted. That passing of the train from one track to another was instantaneous, but its travel on the track to which it has passed will be longer or shorter according to circumstances. A man has lived an indolent life. In youth he did not learn an occupation because his father was rich, and he had a right to be a fool ! When he reaches twenty-five or thirty years of age, his father fails, and he finds himself without means, and with no habits of industry. The person that is most miserable and the most unfit to live, is the child that is brought up in the midst


of luxury and refinement until he is a man grown, without knowing how to do anything, and then is stripped bare, so that he is obliged to live by doing something. He has not the toughness of those that are brought up grossly, and he has fine susceptibilities, which are so many avenues of suffering. No one is so wretched as he who has had everything and suddenly finds himself with nothing, and with no skill or training with which to obtain anything. He may know how to think, but he does not know how to turn a thought into a thing. After a little, this man, who at the bottom has a resolute nature, says to himself, "I must begin my life all over again. I have been brought up by an injudicious father to do *nothing*, and I must now learn to work." He, perhaps, is of an ingenious turn of mind, and he offers himself to a neighboring

cabinet-maker, and the rich-poor man's son says, "Will you take me and give me my board and clothes, and teach me cabinet-making?" After some parley, the bargain is made, and the moment that youth enters his employer's service he is *changed*. He was a *do-nothing* before; he is a *do-something* now. He was a man without a purpose before, but now he is a man whose life is re-fashioned on the theory of industry. He is now taken out of his old pursuits and companionships and influences, and thoughts about himself, and instead of being a mere exotic flower, good for nothing in the chill atmosphere of adversity, he is now growing out of doors where men may get something off from him. Now, the *change* took place *when*? At the instant when he first said, "I *will* learn an industry, and be a man and take care of myself

and others too !” But he did not know his trade. He was not yet a skilful work man. He could not turn out a fine piece of furniture. Still the change had taken place. His purpose was altered, although all the consequences of his new volition were yet to be developed in him.

Now it is just the same in spiritual things. Conversion is the change in purpose and direction which takes a man, inside and out, from a lower to a higher way of living. The change that takes a man away from that which is bad, and carries him toward that which is good, and gives him a purpose of making this new course a continuous thing, is conversion ; and it takes on diversified forms as infinite as the education, the character and the methods of mankind. A little child is brought up in a Christian family, by a wise, discreet father and mother,

taught the name of Christ from the beginning, educated into the right way and made plastic and docile, and if he goes on to the end, as we say in the Baptismal office, "according to this beginning," he needs no conversion beside. Where a boy, in love with his mother, learns, through her, what goodness and purity and spiritual excellences are, and takes to them with all his manly, little heart, *that* is conversion, that is character-building on the right foundation, and it stands if the child goes on, and opens up, and develops. And because the Divine Spirit comes to children more quickly than to others, our Lord directs us to become as little children in order to find an entrance into His Kingdom. The younger they are, within the sphere and scope of knowledge, the more susceptible they are. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. They



come naturally and easily into things that other people have to come into by a great struggle ; and theirs is the right way—the natural way—the way of “ first the blade, then the ear.” This is the New Testament doctrine and the doctrine of common sense as well. The child is as susceptible to spiritual as to social things. We train our children in music, in drawing, in dancing, and in general knowledge. We say that little children learn French and German so much better when they are little. Oh, fathers and mothers, it is the lisping tongues, too, that catch most quickly the language of the Heavenly country. It is so much better to train to virtue and holiness, so that the child should never know where the point of transition is. That is the truest and best conversion, but not necessarily the only one. Sometimes, from the force of circumstances,

a man has been early thrown upon the world and, growing up with no restraint, becomes simply hardened in vice and every evil thing. Now it would be a very dangerous thing to teach a man that he could be wicked for a series of years, and then be converted as by a lightning flash that should burn up, root and branch, all the wickedness that was in his soul before. If a man has led a life of sin, his conversion consists of two things—the “Cease to do evil” and “Learn to do well.” He must pay for his wickedness by watch and toil, and learn late in life the lessons that he should have learned earlier. We remember the command, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” The late repentant will find the Divine Spirit ever ready to be appropriated, but

there must be the human will to act upon. Just as the sunlight has in it all harvests, yet nothing can be reaped until that sunlight is appropriated by some seed or root or blossom. Sahara has no wheat nor corn, though flooded with perennial sunshine. The harvest is the result of the seed-nature, working *with* the sun. So the man's conversion is wrought both by the Divine influence and the exercise of his own energies. It is a work of co-operation. The Divine Spirit is always ready to brood over a soul. It is like the mother's heart. It is universal and infinite. It is the mother-soul of the universe, with infinite power and sweetness shining down upon all—falling like the rain upon the just and upon the unjust, stimulating them to be better, and when any soul appropriates it and acts in unison with it, that moment the work is done. The

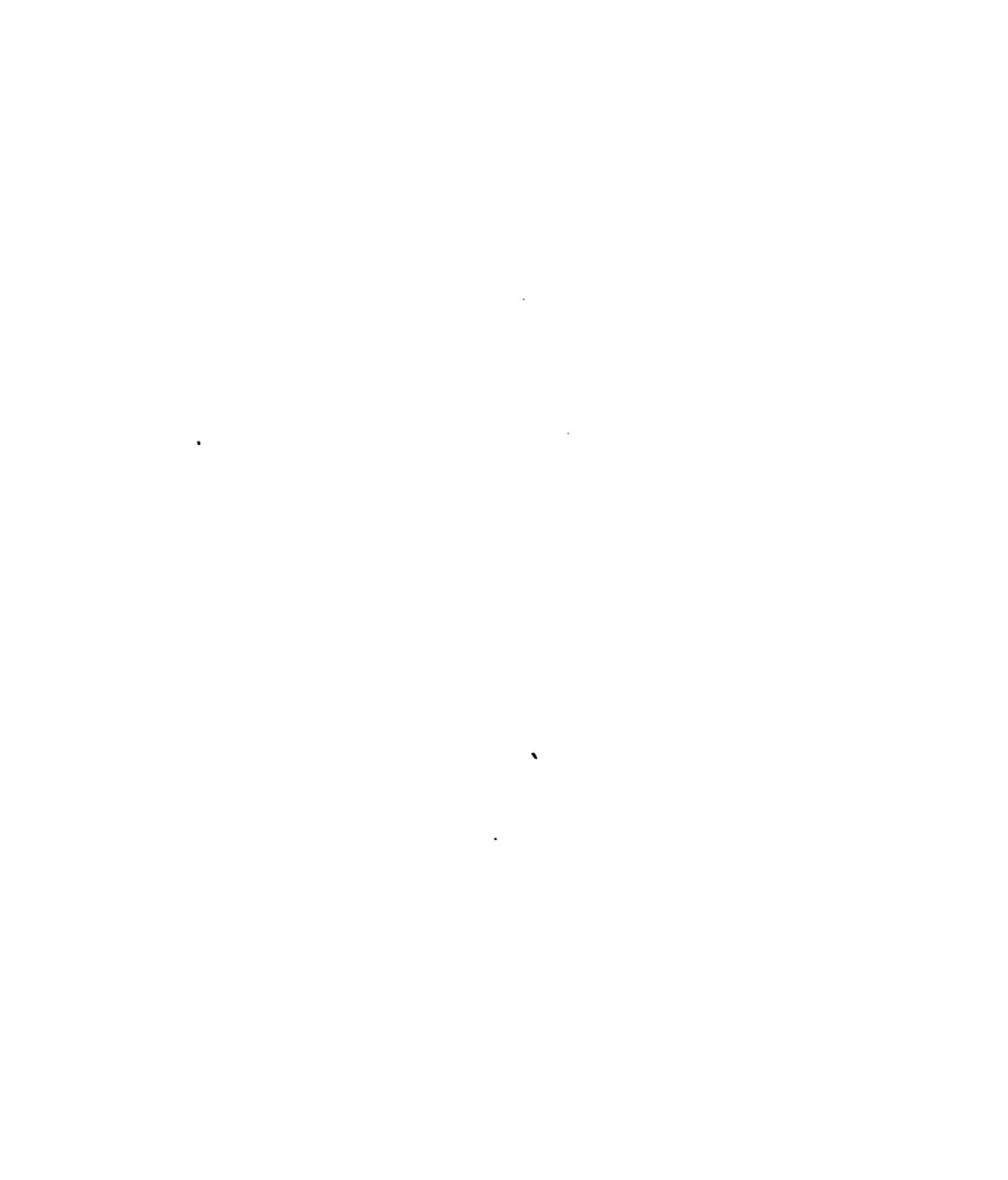
trouble, and a very real one, is the notion which a false theology has become responsible for, that is, that there must be a certain experience common to all who become, as the expression goes, "conscious Christians." Some persons are doubtless brought into a condition of exaltation, sometimes. Christ seems, to all of us, sometimes, nearer than at others. Sometime, when one has laid the burden of sin down in contrite confession, and the windows of the soul are opened to the sunlight of God's pardoning love, the peace from Absolution and the being once more at one with God comes pouring in and the soul, as it were, basks in the warmth of the Divine Presence. Everything seems transformed, from blackness and wretchedness into glory and joy. It is a blessed experience and a very real one. But the mischief lies in this, that such experiences

are made to be despotic ; and good people, entirely devoid of imagination, are waiting and longing for some one else's experience before they shall feel that *they* are of the elect. It is as if the violet would not admit itself to be a flower, because growing in the same garden, under the same influences, beneath the same sky, it did not develop into the stately rose tree or magnificent tulip. Do not measure your own experiences by any other's. Love Christ, and loving Him seek to do His will, and leave evidences and experiences with Him. Conversion now, is just what it was in St. Paul's day. It shows itself in the teachableness of a little child. It requires the old and hardened sinner to become as a little child. It finds its expression now, as then, in the cry of the soul, " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to *do* ? " The answer, so simple, yet such

a test of faith that wise men of to-day turn away like Naaman in a rage—the answer comes, “Wash and be clean;” “This do in remembrance of me;” “*Except; Except*”—six times the conditions are repeated—“ye cannot enter in.”



SERMON IV.



"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you."—ST. JOHN, vi. 53.

THE whole drift and burden of this chapter are most remarkable. It is so full of instruction and, withal, so plain, that it would seem impossible that there should be any diversity of interpretation. It opens with that exquisite picture of the five thousand, sitting upon the grass beside the sea of Galilee, fed by that marvelous miracle which divided the five barley loaves and two small fishes into such a bountiful feast, that the hungry multitude were filled. The lad gave *all* he had to Christ. It seemed only enough to satisfy the hunger of one poor little body, but the Master blessed it, as He divided it, and committed it to the hands of His ministry. In their hands, they know not

how, it is multiplied to feed the whole waiting throng of hungry followers. Ah! it is a blessed thought for each one of us, conscious of our individual short-coming and insignificance, that when we confess Christ before men, we simply put ourself, our gifts, our power of service, into His hands. It is not the mere moral effect of a good resolution, solemnly and openly made, which is the essence of confirmation. It is more than that. It is no idle word we speak when we sign the Child Christ's faithful soldier and servant to its life's end. That word *you* ratify and confirm unto Christ's minister, the successor of the Apostles whom He commissioned. You, yourself, offer those gifts of yours, or small or great, it matters not. What are they among so many? If they are small, they are enough for Him. If they are great, what is one man's life to

the whole world? The *worth*, remember, lies not in the gift, but in the offering. Again and again, in the history of the Church, has this miracle been repeated. The men whose thoughts had been the noblest, whose sayings have fed the soul's hunger of thousands, have not fancied they were doing any mighty matter. They simply obeyed the voice of the Master calling them. They gave to Christ what they had. Faith and obedience begin the work. Christ accepts and blesses it to the world's gain. I love to remember that she, who put into the treasury the two mites, probably thought within her heart, "what are they among so many?" Yet the Lord saw, and made of that slender gift the exemplar and inspiration of all Christian offering. I love to remember that the slenderness and meagerness of the gift

has no relation to what it may do. He can make one man's goodness and truth so to be received by many, as to be to them the support they need. He can make His Church, with all its defects and shortcomings, effectual to the feeding of human souls. It is conditioned simply upon this, that they, His ministers, receive of Him, and deliver obediently that they have received. God hushes all doubts and murmurings of distrust with a simple command. The chapter goes on to describe the doings of the following day, when the crowd sought Him again, and He said to them, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." * * * "I am the Bread of Life; he that cometh to me

shall never hunger." I like to remember that our Lord worked a miracle to relieve the *temporal* wants of His followers to whom afterward He preached. It is the model for all philanthropic work. The warm meal should always be the forerunner of the tract. The giving a homily against gluttony or intemperance to a hungry, destitute man, or a little dissertation against worldliness and love of dress to a shivering, tattered woman, is not unlike much of the effort to ameliorate suffering which we see about us to-day. But Christ-like philanthropy gathers the hungry, and cold, and naked, and sick. It feeds and clothes and visits; and *then* out of the overflowing plenty of its love, it teaches from the lower plain of perishable food the wonderful, higher truth of *the* bread which giveth eternal life. The people are ready to hear and

are prepared to grasp the analogy between so real and tangible a thing as the bread which they have eaten and the bread which Christ declares Himself to be, and which for all time He makes possible for them and us to feed upon in the holy mysteries of His eucharistic feast. In feeding the multitude upon the grassy slopes of Galilee with perishable bread, He forced the gift upon no man among the thousands. Whoso craves other food, whoso despises the Lord's gift, whoso prefers to eat of his own store may do so, only he shall not be filled. "Make the men sit down," is the Lord's command. He will not give with His own hands, because He wishes to teach them the need of the visible ministry. We may imagine other ways in which the miracle could be wrought. He who showered down manna in the desert for each to

gather, is not limited in His power. He who made the frame of man, could ordain that its hunger should pass and the body be strengthened without the aid of visible food. We only know that He did not so will it to be. He also ordained that bread and wine should be the creatures, and His ministry on earth, they who by consecration should give to His people that body and blood by which their souls should be strengthened as their bodies are by the bread and wine. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." Those hearers listened only to the words, but saw no hidden meaning, and in anger they cried out like carnal-minded men to-day, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" As to be carnally-minded is death, so they who to-day can grasp no spiritual meaning from this teaching, are

dead also. The truth which He spake then, and which is as true to-day, was and is the great bond and token of Christian unity. Why do we see the body of Christ riven and torn asunder—the members of His body dwarfed or paralyzed or separated? Because all are not nourished by *the* bread. As in the early Church after the preaching of St. Peter there were added to the number of believers about three thousand souls by baptism, we are told, “they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of (*the*) bread and in prayers.” *The* bread, as the Greek must be rendered, can refer to nothing else than the Eucharistic bread, while the frequency of the feast is indicated by the further statement that “they continuing *daily* with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house.”

Surely, when our blessed Lord used those words, "This is my body;" "Do this in remembrance of me," He intended to convey some mysterious meaning.

There are those about us—nay, some among us—who presumptuously explain away the mystery, and declare that our Lord established a commemorative feast by which He was to be kept in remembrance. But when He declares continually in such strong language, "I am the Bread of Life; whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day," we must believe that the mystery must be commensurate with the mystery of the incarnation, with the fact of the existence of that double nature united in the one person, the person who could declare, "I and my Father are one." The Rector of Honiton, in his treatise upon the

“Mysteries of God,” quotes from a work which I would be glad to have read extensively.

It declares :

“All words have a meaning, a significance, and effect according to the nature of him whose they are. The words of God are of the nature of God—Divine, living, and powerful ; the words of an angel are, as that angel is, in power and perfection ; the words of a devil have only his nature and power, and therefore they can only and solely tempt to evil ; the words of man are as men are—weak, vain, and earthly, and of a poor and low significance. To direct us, therefore, to the common rules of speaking amongst men as the only means of knowing all that the Son of God spoke, when he spoke of Himself, and on such an occasion, and in such circumstances as never did, nor ever can happen or belong to any one but Himself, is surely no small mistake.”

And so the Church has always taught that the words spoken of Himself by

Christ, meant precisely what they seemed to mean, that the bread of communion was indeed His body, and the cup of communion was indeed His blood, but the mystery has never been explained. The denial of all mystery on the one hand, making the communion a mere remembrance to us, and the monstrous materialism on the other hand of that Church which dares to explain the mystery by the vulgar jugglery of Transubstantiation have both their rebuke in the plain statement of the Church's catechism, with no profanation of explanation of the "how" where God, Himself, is silent.

All along the ages we have the direct testimony first of those who lived very near our Lord's own time.

Justin Martyr, who lived A.D., 133, said :

"We do not receive it [the Eucharist] as common bread and wine, but in what way Jesus Christ

our Saviour, being through the Word of God Incarnate, had both Flesh and Blood for our Salvation ; so likewise have we been taught that the food, over which thanksgiving has been made by the prayer of the word which is from Him ; from which food our blood and flesh are by transmutation nourished, is the Flesh and Blood of Him the Incarnate Jesus." (First Apology, chap. lxvi.)

St. Irenæus declared :

" We offer to Him His own, announcing consistently the fellowship and union of the Flesh and Spirit. For as the bread which is produced from the earth, when it receives the Invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly ; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of the resurrection to Eternity."

Tertullian, who lived in Africa, A.D. 190, says :

" Because in the bread is understood His body—*'This is My Body'*—wherefore, in praying for daily

bread, we pray to be perpetually in Christ, and undivided from His body." (On Prayer, chap. vi., vol. i., p. 184.)

Clement, of Alexandria, A.D. 192 :

" 'Eat ye,' He saith, 'My Flesh, and drink My Blood.' Such is the suitable food which the Lord ministers, and he offers His Flesh and pours forth His Blood, and nothing is wanting for the children's growth. O amazing mystery ! We are enjoined to cast off the old and carnal corruption, as also the old nutriment, receiving in exchange another new regimen, that of Christ ; receiving Him, if we can, to hide Him within." (Pædag, book i, chap. vi., vol. i., p. 142.)


Now, these early Christians, knew nothing else but of the mystery. It was not for a full thousand years that the Church held any other belief, and then only a schismatic portion brought forth the dogma of Transubstantiation.

What would those early believers think could they look upon rent Christendom to-day? They would behold one National Church gathering its gaunt and hungry souls together twice a year to its so-called sacrament; Christian bodies with their communion Sabbaths on the first Lord's day of each alternate month. Congregations within our own pale observing a Holy, Protestant, First Sunday in the month, and many wise ones declaring that to them the frequent communion *cheapens* and makes less solemn the Holy Feast. Those early Christians, remembering their early secret gatherings, their eagerness to partake of this sacred food as often as they could, would recall to mind how safe and happy, how strong and brave they felt in their nearness to Jesus; how, when they had confessed and heard the holy,


cleansing words of absolution and then had fed upon the sacred food, and drunk the life-giving stream, they went to their daily tasks so bravely and so cheerfully. How shocked and grieved they would be to see so many of us lightly regarding and often neglecting such privileges ! “ Have they never been taught ? ” Where are their Bibles ? Where their teachers ? Do they not realize that except they eat His flesh and drink His Blood they have no life in them ? They know their bodies would die without proper food ; do they think their souls can live and grow and progress and be made fit for heaven when they are starved ? I can fancy Tertullian saying just such things and thinking so of this generation ; and then too he would startle us with the question : “ Have you not known that Christ hath said, ‘ Whoso eateth My Flesh and

drinketh my Blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.' "

May not the marvellous miracle of the resurrection of the just be contained in that life-giving power? Many whom we have loved long since and lost awhile are sleeping in their graves. To some of us this Lent is our last on earth. Is it not a grand and holy thought that we with them have on our foreheads the sign of the Cross which, like the blood mark on the lintel of the door-posts, caused the Angel of Destruction to pass over? And so also within their mouldering bodies has Christ's body been enshrined, and therefore they contain the life-germ which shall cause them and us to rise at the last in the Image of Him who made us. Surely, if words mean anything, we may have this hope from that wonderful declaration of the God-Man.



But, dear friends, shrink always from talking with irreverent people about this mystery. Fools, sometimes, you know, dare to rush in where angels fear to tread. Simply declare the Church's dogma that it is a mystery. That the outward and visible sign and the inward and spiritual grace are the two parts of the Sacrament, that Our Lord instituted it and commanded us to continue it. That we know from precious experience its gracious peace and holy comfort. That we are content to adore the mystery, but would never profane it by any attempt at explanation, but are glad to thank God who thus feeds our souls, and so brings strength out of weakness, content, too, in grateful adoration to exclaim ever before the altar of the Cross, "O My God, Thou art true ; O my soul, thou art happy !"



SERMON V.



"*Except* your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."—ST. MATT. v. 20.

WHILE it is certain that our Lord's will is that all should be saved, we have seen how strong the language is by which He *excepts*, on the one hand, those who *can* not enter into the kingdom, as though from the very nature of the case it were impossible ; and, on the other hand, those who *shall* not, as though He by no means would permit them to enter in. The *except* of this text shows that the Scribes and Pharisees had a sort of righteousness, but our Lord declares that if our righteousness does not exceed that we shall be excluded from an entrance into His kingdom. Now, in what did their condemned righteousness consist ? In

too great a reverence for forms and ceremonies, forgetting the spirit in the slavish following of the letter of the Law, which was to them the whole of religion, and also in their lack of charity for those who were not entirely of their mind and way of thinking. The name "Pharisee" meant separatist—the "touch me not" of one who thinks himself better than others—and *of* himself more highly than he ought to think. But I very strongly am of the opinion that while we are wont to condemn them as historical examples of hypocrisy, if we had lived in their day and had judged them with man's judgment alone, we should have characterized them as a very admirable and worthy class of religionists. They were very careful observers of the minutest point of every ceremonial, and were honestly endeavoring to lead lives conformable entirely to

the precepts of the Law. I can not blame them, as many religious teachers do, for they were living up to the light they had. They were the conservatives of their day. They kept themselves, at all events, from the world. They would on no account intermarry with the heathen. They accomplished a most excellent and absolutely required work among their own people. But in process of time, when they came back to their native country, and new national laws, customs and usages were in vogue, they interpreted the Mosaic statute in a narrow and scrupulous manner, and became a hard-headed and stubborn people; but they were conscientious, I believe. They had ever in mind the *reward* which was promised them—that they should become the head nation of the earth if they perfectly obeyed the law. They have their counterpart in those re-


ligionists of to-day who at certain seasons make the weary round from church to church, offering the stated number of prayers at the many shrines, for which penance they are to receive such and such an indulgence. In neither case is there any conception beyond the dead letter. No idea of any living, vital principle. No throbbing pulse beneath the external clay. The Law was for them on the tables of stone, written by the finger of God Himself, "Thou shalt, and thou shalt not," and this they endeavored to obey in every jot and tittle; looking for their ascendancy over the nations as their reward. But on the fleshly tablets of their hearts no love to God and man was written as that upon which hung all the Law and the prophets. It was this fulfilling that Christ came to accomplish, to show the harmony of law and gospel. It is *this*

righteousness, which exceeds that of the dead letter of Scribes and Pharisees, that we must have to make us ready for the kingdom of Heaven. The righteousness of the Pharisee consisted in doing certain things. The righteousness which Christ requires puts the soul into the doing. It teaches the moral heart of every precept.

The one says, "Worship one God." The other says, "God is love, and he who dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God." The one says, "Kill not." The sweet voice from Olivet declares, "If a man hate his brother, he is a murderer." The Law says, "Thou shalt not steal." The Christian interpretation reads, "Let him labor that he may give to him that needeth." The Hebrew law says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." The Christian says, "Know ye not that your body is the


temple of the Holy Ghost ?” The code of the Pharisee carried out in the religious life of a churchman of to-day would doubtless receive the commendation of good people. If we see men and women always in their place at church, scrupulously careful in their observance of the Lenten fast, foremost in their subscriptions to all charities, we are alway sinclined to feel sure of their honesty and their goodness ; and so, it seems to me, that we should have commended the Pharisee of our Lord’s time. But we must remember that the fault lies in the resting in these external things. No number of frequented services, no careful bending of the head at the mention of the sacred name, no abundance of alms are acceptable in God’s sight without the *spirit* of devotion, the heart’s contrition, the charity which *is* love. Oh ! men and women, if

you and I could simply lay hold of this truth, "The Kingdom of God is *within* you." That is the practical point. It gives the worth and the meaning to every form. Each one of us has the spiritual kingdom of true manhood and true womanhood, with the power and liberty of every part of a man in it, within ourselves; and while history again and again has shown the breaking down and crumbling away of religions which have been tried, wholly without forms, relying only upon the basis of a spiritual isolation, I can well understand the honest endeavor to form such a religion. When tried and grieved with the cold formalism of a dead or perfunctory ritual, a soul longs for the spirituality which may successfully war against sense, and, impatient of those influences which have smothered all true sublimity of a pure devotion, struggles to



extricate itself from the body of forms which have become hateful in their tendency to degrade the spiritual in worship. And so within the Church from the beginning there has been, as the famous preacher of the "Inner Temple" puts it, "a perpetual oscillation between the too much and the too little in these respects; between a worship oppressed with carnality, and a worship extinguished in the effort to sublime it."

But be assured that God, who looks upon the heart, regards all forms as the simple outward expression of the inward feeling. The Pharisees were rigorous *moralists*, they were rigidly conscientious, they paid their just dues, they kept every law in the decalogue. What prevented their life being acceptable to Christ? Because it lacked just what the moralists of to-day lack. The *living spirit* of right



conduct : the inward love of right, all of what we call spirituality. It is wonderful how extremes meet. The moralist says, "I do not wish to belong to any church ;" "I do not wish to be baptized ;" "I hate creeds and forms and mummery ;" "If I *do* the best that I know how to do, visit the fatherless and the widow, do unto others as I would be done by, I am quite willing to trust my hereafter upon that." They are, in practice, bringing their *good works* in their hands, believing that by them they merit a reward. It is strangely like the principle of indulgence and creature merit of that Papal Church they despise.


The law of Christ declares that nothing can save but the blood of the Redeemer. To make it efficacious, He gives one simple rule, "Believe and be baptized ;" and the moralist of our day replies, "Many

who never were admitted into the *visible* Church at all, are accepted in God's sight for they belong to His *invisible* Church." I have heard this urged, although I could never understand its relevancy to a man's own duty. No man can be acceptable to God who does not love Him. No man can love God who does not freely obey His requirements. The plain requirements are Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. The moralist answers, "Many persons have been and will be saved without these." Thank God, then, for His great mercy. *He can* excuse from His requirements. But that gives no man liberty to excuse himself. For you and for me, for all who live within the means of grace, willful neglect of them is disobedience to God. The moralist asks, "Do you say that Baptism is a saving ordinance?" I reply, No one

can love God without obeying His commands, and no one can enter the kingdom of Heaven who does not love God, and I can not see how a man can say he has this love who is living in open disobedience. He is substituting his own way for God's way. It all seems to lead around again to the antagonism, or rather, the relation between morality and religion. The Pharisee's scrupulousness for the *letter* of observances, *versus* the Christ-demanded *spirit* by which one righteousness was to exceed the other. Carried into our daily life the moral man, or the man with the Pharisee kind of righteousness, seems to me to be like a mariner sailing by "dead reckoning," endeavoring to find his course on a fog-bound sea by measuring the distance he has to run but without any "observation" of the heavenly bodies.

Just picture to yourself the typical moral man. A good citizen, a kind neighbor, one who respects the laws of society, avoiding all the vices which a public sentiment pronounces immoral. He obeys the laws which regulate business. He is restrained by his rule of life from breaking the public peace. He would not trespass upon his neighbor's property. He justifies himself in the absence of all spiritual religion by saying that "I am a good father, a kind friend, my word is as good as my bond. I am honest, truthful, faithful to obligations, sincere in my relations as a man with men." Now, regarding human society as a structure made up of individual men, too strong an emphasis can not be put upon the necessity of those laws which regulate the intercourse of citizens with each other. It is of transcendent importance as a scheme of life

outwardly. It is, nevertheless, the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees—good as far as it went, but utterly deficient, and utterly without worth as a motive for action. Such a man as I have described may have a system of right living, wholly apart from any *love* of right. You very well know that no one can throw one's whole soul into a work which one does not love. A man may give to the poor because public sentiment would be turned against him if he did not, and yet be utterly unacquainted with the feeling of benevolence. The good to the poor will have been done, but the benefit to the man's own soul will be lost. It is as if I threw a piece of silver at the beggar at my door intending to hurt him or drive him away. He picks up the coin and buys himself bread. The good to him will be the same as if I gave it with a




blessing, but to *me*, the *motive* of doing to him as to one of Christ's little ones being absent, the *subjective* benefit to me is lost.

The sculptor who, working upon the lifeless marble, and has no passion in his love for the work, no love that makes the cold stone almost blush at its own consciousness and palpitate with *his* love as he breathes into the nostrils the breath of his own life, is no artist. Three pencil strokes of Raphael are a greater and a better picture than ever Carlo Dolci polished into inanity. That is why the free school of art is so popular. Its truth consists in the expression of the whole art, as it were, in brief; the effect, the suggestion, the soul is there; all the fineness of detail, all the accessories which add to its realism are mechanical and apart from the simple art itself. If one

atom of *thought* has vanished, all color, all finish, all execution, all ornament are too dearly bought. Nothing but thought can pay for thought, and the instant that the increasing refinement or finish of the picture begins to be paid for by the loss of the faintest shadow of an idea, that instant all refinement and finish is an excrescence and a deformity. So a man that paints, without loving art, never is, and never can be an artist. A man that obeys moral laws without loving them, because they are the outgrowth of the Christ spirit within him, has no other righteousness than that of the Scribes and Pharisees. One thing he lacks. He lacks just that which God requires.

I never hear the talk, so often heard, about the excellence of certain people's lives (and it sounds plausible enough when it is said "he is far better than many

who *profess* much more"), that my heart does not ache and cry out, "Alas, what a commentary upon Christians!" And yet those men *are* moral men, they are rigidly righteous; but *piety* means something more. We are in this world to build up a kingdom. That kingdom is a kingdom of thought and sentiment, of vitality and virtue. Piety is the power of a new life in the soul. Morality bears about the same relation to this, that our garments do to human society. They are very necessary, but very subordinate. A merely moral character is like the ice palace that they build for a winter's carnival, beautiful while winter lasts, but will never do for a permanent castle. Beautiful as it is in its shimmering whiteness, it will not endure the on-coming heat of summer. Many a man takes the shell and husk and misses the kernel and



meat. Many a man is moral, yet void of all that spirit which it was meant that he should have even in this lower sphere. Jesus Christ, fulfilling the law, declares it not to be enough. He does not say that it is good for nothing, but that it is insufficient; and so, my dear friends, I wish you would ponder this. Do not longer quiet your consciences, as some of you seem most surely to be doing, with the complacent contemplation of your own goodness, but ask of Jesus Christ what He will have you to do. Go to Him with nothing in your hands, but say simply, "To Thy Cross I cling." All that you can bring out of your development is required of you; more than *morality* requires; all that *spirituality* requires, is *demand'd* of you, and I assure you that the experience of every man, who has attempted to live a godly life, is always this—

that he must live by faith in the Son of God, that there must be a divine warmth, a divine light, and a divine prompting by which he can find his way in the accustomed paths of the higher life. Some of you are about to make your first communion. In drawing near the Holy Table never venture there feeling that you are worthy to gather even the crumbs beneath it. Stand firm to every moral obligation, but never say or feel *that* is enough. “*Worthily*” and “worthy” are two very different words. “Worthily,” that is *preparedly*, we may, thank God, draw near ; but “worthy” never, so long as time and sin endure. Constantly keep in mind the future life toward which we are all hastening and sometimes ask yourselves questions like these : “Am I hungry for Heaven ? Have I *now* that spiritual culture which will make me feel at home in

Heaven, and the society of holy saints thoroughly congenial to me? Is my heart quite ready to be laid naked and bare before the searching eye of God?" Shun any thought of personal merit, or any ground of acceptance founded upon morality; but seek that righteousness which exceedeth that—the righteousness which is bought by Jesu's blood, and make that efficacious by being joined to Him, as the branches to the vine; and when your self-examination shall show you your own hearts all tainted with the leprosy of sin—draw near and wash the stains away in that cleansing flood which is alone sufficient.

SERMON VI.


“*Except ye abide in me.*”—ST. JOHN, xv. 4.

HEAT is one of the characteristics of life—one of the conditions upon which life is sustained ; and just as “cold” is scientifically described as being “absence of heat,” so is the lack of union with *the* vine synonymous with the death of the branches. The two negations are exactly similar. A branch, cut off from this union, dies from the want of that sap and nutrition which are sent forth from the parent stalk, and, having no life, it withers and dies, becoming only fit for the crackling fire into which men throw it for fuel. Our blessed Lord, taking this well-known fact from the natural world, describes Himself under the figure of *the* vine, and the context is rendered,

“As the branch can not bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, *except* ye abide in me.” “I am the *true* vine.” “Ye are the branches.” There was, then, a vine which was *not* true, and in the elder Scriptures we find the key to the interpretation. We find the prophet Jeremiah saying, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed; how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?” (ii. 21.) All through the Old Testament the Jewish Church is described under the figure of a vine, but always under rebuke for not being what it ought to be. It is either reproached for bringing forth grapes of Gomorrah, or none at all; for producing “wild grapes,” “grapes of gall,” “bitter clusters.” But Christ fulfilled that in which the old Israel came short. He is the *true* vine and we the

branches, gaining our spiritual life from those sources which permeate from the root and parent stem. The parable of the vine is, of course, the Lord's representation of His Church, and the analogy is so complete as to form a concise doctrinal statement of the relation between Christ and His Church—both the Church on earth and the Church at rest. Just as the vine has, far down in its earlier growth, the strong branches out of which the later twigs and tendrils shoot forth, so we, who are living, active, fruit-bearing branches, are really the later growth, having our life hid with Christ in God by faith ; as those who have gone before us, having borne their fruit on earth, are sealed up, as it were, into the wood of the vine, thus united with us in that mystical union which one communion makes. It is a blessed thought of com-

fort that we, who are in the true relation of branches to the vine, are so in close communion with those whom we loved, and who are now at rest in the paradise of God, that midway we are standing, as it were, hand in hand with our living and our dead. Our faith in Christ is the measure of our largeness in spiritual growth. Just as the vine, well nurtured and pruned, and growing in a rich soil, expands with its fullness of sap, so we, who are filled with Christ, grow in faith, and our *receiving* power is enlarged until we take in Christ into our inmost soul and experience His presence in all His power. He is sometimes likened unto a *medicine* which is for soul healing; but, as in the natural world, there may be a valuable balsam that works like magic in the cure of pain and suffering and disease, yet is all-powerless until it is taken *into*



a man ; yet when it permeates his whole being, and begins to cleanse the blood and eradicate the causes of suffering, the man begins to feel the return of strength and force. So when we, as branches of the true vine, receive Christ into our spiritual natures, filling our souls with love to virtue and holiness, bathing our hearts in comfort by the brooding, healing power of the Holy Ghost, and firing our souls with heavenly aspirations, then we truly are in union with Christ. Christ believed in, Christ possessed, Christ experienced, Christ in us ! And then, too, if we are really branches of the true vine, we must needs have that vine's nature and bring forth *the* fruit, the grapes, and not something else. We cannot be grape-vines and flowering plants and gigantic trees all at once. We must *be* what we were intended to be—branches of a *vine* of whose

nature we are to partake. Christ, the vine, must fill us so entirely that there can be no room for anything else. And it is marvelous how when Christ does once enter into a soul, how entirely He does occupy and fill the whole being and nature of that soul.

You remember the legend of the man whose pleasure-garden became in his absence quite overgrown with weeds, and, on coming home, he was entirely powerless to exterminate them. "At last he met with a strange foreign flower of singular vitality. He sowed a handful of this seed in his overgrown garden and left it to work its own sweet will. He slept and rose, and knew not how the seed was growing till on a day he opened the gate and saw a sight which much astounded him. He knew that the seed would produce a dainty flower, and he looked for

it ; but he little dreamed that the plant would cover the whole garden. So it was ; the flower had exterminated every weed, till, as he looked from one end to the other, from wall to wall, he could see nothing but the fair colors of that rare plant, and smell nothing but its delicious perfume. Christ is that plant of renown. That vine with its many branches will gradually eat out the roots of all ill weeds and poisonous plants, just as in the garden of each individual soul the Christ in us, if allowed to grow, supplants all else if we are filled with Him." Then it is that out of this fullness will be brought forth the fruits of good living. The branches bring forth both leaves and fruit, and while the vine will be rebuked if it produce "nothing but leaves," we must not disparage them. The leaf is needful to protect the fruit, to receive

the moisture from rain and dew and incorporate it into the life of the tree. So are the leaves of "means of grace" essential to the spiritual life. Each sacrament has the outward and visible sign, the leaves, as well as the inward and spiritual grace, the fruit. But alas! if there be "nothing but" water in the one, and bread and wine in the other; no remission of sins in the one, no body and blood of Christ in the other. And it is the one baptism and the one faith which keep together the one body. It is always a sad subject to talk about when, constituted as we are, we have to teach the truth about the rent and mutilated body of Christ which is His Church.

He is the vine and we are the branches. Now there are on the earth many bodies of men calling themselves Christians to whom are given the fruits of the Spirit,

and yet they do not call themselves by our name. But, as there is but one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, I am constrained to believe that there are many people who really are branches of the true vine, but who have not all the benefits, because either from want of knowledge or of proper teaching they have not seen or known the more excellent way. The question for us is, what are we to think and to do about these Christian bodies who are showing in their life and works so many signs of the one body?

We believe ourselves to be a branch of the true Church, growing out of the Church of the Apostles which has its root in Christ. We must obey our own rules and walk in our own ways. The question is how are we to treat and feel about other people who are not with us. Now, we are not to say that there are no differ-

ences. There are very real ones. If one of us were excommunicated from some body of Christians—Presbyterian or Roman Catholic, or Methodist, not for any moral fault, but simply because we did not believe some point of doctrine held by them to be an essential pre-requisite to communion, and so come here and have been received—then it becomes a very serious matter. One thing is true. If that excommunication was wrong, if that other body had no right to require us to believe such a thing, and if it had no real power to cut anybody off from Christ's Church, then it could not matter to us. If this Church has the power rightly to receive us, then the other has no power to cast us out. We have to settle that question upon our own responsibility and risk. But after that, we can hardly say there are *no differences*. But what should be our

thoughts and feelings toward those who are not with us ?

You often hear it said, " Oh, there are no essential differences, there are no sects in heaven ;" of course there are not, nor ever will be, and it strikes me that is a most admirable reason for not having any sects on earth. But we all shall have ample time to learn much before we reach heaven ; even if it be after our souls leave our bodies. I believe at least this, that we shall see that many things we call differences now, are no differences at all, and that others are outward differences only. There is a great deal of idle talk about the disunity in the Church, and about people who will be saved and those who will not. It is, first of all, no one's business to say whom God will save and whom He will not. Our business is to point out as truly as we know how, what

God has declared to be the way of salvation, and bid you all take that way. But *this* is true, at the same time, that it is of the most vital importance for us to be trying to *do* God's will, for then shall we surely *know* of the doctrine. Surely He has nowhere shown it to be His will that His Church should be all broken and rent into numberless divisions. "It must needs be that offences must come, but woe to him by whom the offence cometh." It is an awful crime to cause a schism in the Body of Christ. It is a hard thing for a simple-hearted, honest person to know what is the right body to belong to. Where a man or woman has grown up in a body, under its teaching, and found good there, and comfort there in the Saviour's mercy, I should feel it a most necessary thing to be very sure that in bringing such an one into the old paths, he should be

taught fully "*the reason why*" of every change. Terrible as I believe many of the teachings of the Church of Rome to be, I would not lightly unsettle the faith of one of its worshipers, unless I could hope to give a better in its place. Surely God permits us to be born and grow up, some under one influence, and some under another; and we can only believe that He has room for some who have not kept to the old paths and the pure faith; that there are some branches in union with the vine although not growing so near the stalwart trunk—nor bringing forth the best and most perfected fruit.

Let us not, however, say that it matters not what a man believe if he only be sincere. If I get upon a train at the station, being sincere in the belief that it is bound for New York, and still it is really the Boston train, the sincerity of my be-

lief is of no avail, for if I keep on I shall never arrive at my destination except by a very circuitous route. As a man *really believes*, so he does. If he takes poison, although *believing* it to be a cordial, it *does* matter. If a man be born blind, he is not expected to do the things which a seeing man ought to do, but that does not make it a desirable thing to be blind. In the parable of the talents, one servant found out the most excellent way, and made his one talent gain ten, another followed *his* way and gained but five. God gave his approval to both, but did not commend *at all* the servant who failed to try his best to do the Master's will. So we are to believe there is a best way, and to earnestly look for it. The way may go wrong on two sides; on one side it may fail to get *all* the truth. Like the Quaker who believes in the inward and

spiritual sacraments ordained by Christ Himself, but he does not believe in the outward and visible signs equally ordained by Christ. Surely he loses much, but we may hope that he does not lose all. At the same time *we* are to believe all that he does and more. While his belief in Christ may unite him to the vine, it is as an off-shoot, yet containing some life from the root. Then there is the devotee of the Roman Church who believes too much; a branch, indeed, but one that needs a vast deal of pruning. Still, with all the differences, if all hold the one Lord, the one faith, and the one baptism, broken and rent and divided as we seem, I believe that while the vine is one, and the branches have these elements of unity, they must have life.

Those who were baptized with water in the Triune Name were made members of

one body. Those who believe in Him receive one Lord. Those who serve him truly keep one Faith. But remember always that all this does not make the companies in which men associate *churches*, unless these are assembled according to God's ordinance. Suppose, for example, a number of you should gather at one of your houses and read your Bibles and sing hymns, while the service is going on here, that would not make you cease to be members of this church, nor make your company another church and parish. It might make, if you had no good motive or reason, very indifferent members, and your way a very bad way, that would soon lead you into unchristian habits and practices, but it could never take you out of our body.

Practically, I would say to every baptized believer, You are a Christian and

a member of the Church of Christ, but your *assembly* is simply a society, voluntarily formed of men who belong, in virtue of their baptism, to the Church of Christ. Why do you remain away from the practice of primitive usage? Is the prayer-book your stumbling-block? Is the surplice your cause of offence? Is it not better for you to bear with them than to present to the unbelieving world the spectacle of a seemingly divided body? Practically, I would ask, what are the points of contact? Let us seize hold of those, and as *we* believe the Church to be of Divine origin and that we can prove it; while *you* hold it to be of human origin and of man's devising, let us meet upon the ground which is common to both. For example, we both believe that "Blessed are the peacemakers," let us lay our plans and use our influence to heal some breach or some

quarrel, or misunderstanding. Let us strive to make this city purer and better by our united efforts and with the common basis of one Lord, one Faith; and one Baptism, one God and Father of us all; this would be one step toward bringing us into one church and household of the faith. Practically, I would advise you against unlearned and foolish disputations about religious matters. In talking with those who are not of your belief, endeavor to find points of contact rather than points of difference, and so lead them more and more toward your way, and so help to heal our unhappy divisions.

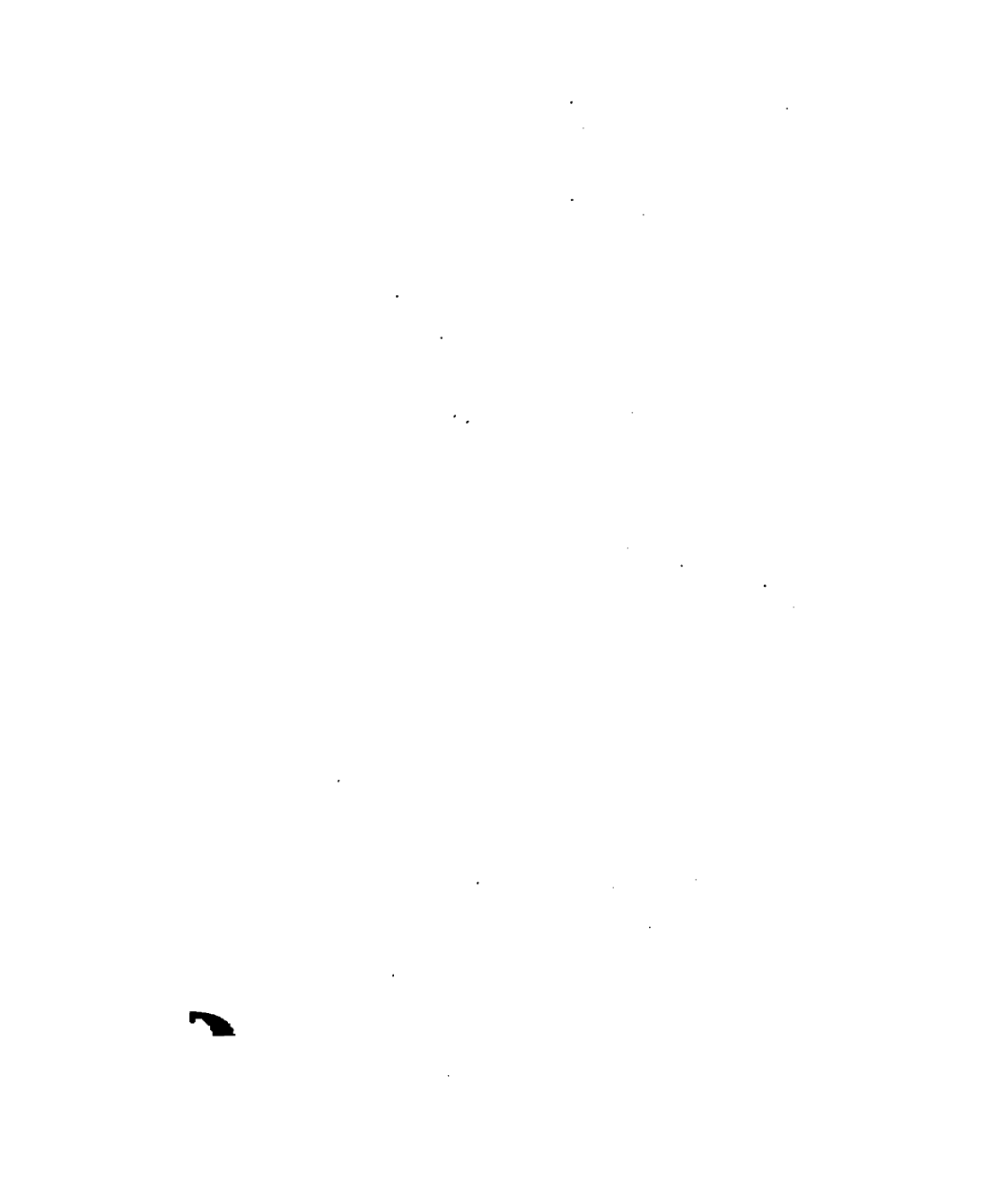
The branches get their life from the vine. Christ feeds us from Himself, and the more we discern Him in His sacraments, the closer are we united to the True Vine. While the branches are many the life and the faithfulness of each de-



pend upon the directness of its union. Each baptized member is a branch, *with life*. Its nourishment, its destiny, its fruitfulness depends upon its daily food. Pray, then, for each one, that every member may know and perceive the truth, and so hunger after it, that it may have an *abundant* entrance into the kingdom of God. Not to have *just enough* life to be born into the kingdom, but to so *abound* with life that it may have an *abundant* entrance, with all that fullness of capacity for the enjoyment of Heaven which a continual abiding with Christ would ensure.







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